DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 916 CS 507 359

AUTHOR Schario, Tracy A.
TITLE Warm Bodies: A Student Perspective.
PUB DATE Nov 90
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (76th, Chicago, IL, November 1-4, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Debate; Higher Education; Persuasive Discourse; Qualifications; Speech Communication; *Student Attitudes; Surveys; *Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS Debate Strategies; *Debate Tournaments

ABSTRACT

A participant in forensic tournament competition presents her perspective as well as overall student reaction to the function of "warm bodies," competitors who are entered in a tournament by the coach or tournament director only to meet qualifying requirements. Overall, participants in an informal survey believed that the warm body practice benefits many individuals, giving them an opportunity for competition and achievement they may not have had otherwise. Furthermore, even though most warm body entries are not identified as such and in turn are evaluated as legitimate competition, competitors generally do not see widespread damage to overall competition. Also, while the warm body practice may be leaning toward "overuse" in certain events or at certain tournaments, and in rare incidents may cause more harm than the intended good, student participants seem to have no major qualms or objections to warm bodies when used to meet qualifying requirements. (KEH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED326916

"Ethical Issues in Forensics: Evaluating the I. E. *Warm Body* Syndrome"

"*Warm Bodies:* A Student Perspective"

Tracy A. Schario, The Ohio State Univeristy

76th Annual SCA Convention
November 1-4, 1990
Chicago, Illinois

CS507359

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Tracy A. Schario

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

I remember the scenario like it happened yesterday. My duo partner and I were sitting in our third round of duo competition at a tournament in early February. This is a true story. "Contestants 502-503," the judge calls. Everything proceeded as usual. The contestants walked to the front of the room; introduced themselves (names are being withheld to protect the innocent); and they began their script interpretation of "The Artist at Lunchtime" or something like that.

Ok, so the title seemed a bit hookey, but I didn't think much more about it. After their introduction, the male and female interpers returned to their "script." They continued with a polite conversation about what and where to lunch. Then all of a sudden, out of the blue, the female character and the "artist," the guy painting her house, started "kissing." My partner and I looked at each other rather strangely. Watching two people standing side by side, hugging themselves, and kissing the air looked very odd. "Someone thinks this has artistic merit?" I thought to myself. I wasn't impressed. But whom am I to judge; we were doing a piece on two law students.

They continued. Then just when I thought, "this can't get any weirder, and I wish they would stop kissing and talk," they did. I was thankful but still uneasy. What should I expect next, cigarette smoking? --- or is that stretching things a bit? Instead, there was what seemed like a ten-minute pause, but I'm sure is was not more than three or four seconds. The entire scenario up to this point had only taken about two minutes tops. What came next, though, was something that no one in the room could have ever anticipated.

The male interper, calmly looking at the ga-ga-eyed female interper, said, "That's the Best Warm Body I've ever had." What followed was to be expected, an uproarious laughter from which even the judge could not refrain. Boy, did I feel stupid. I actually believed they were serious, and that I would have to sit through about 8 more minutes of sappy love scenes. WRONG. They were just there so some other duo pair could make finals and possibly qualify for one of the national tournaments.

The "Artist at Lunchtime" example portrays the function of warm bodies, competitors who are entered in a tournament by the coach and/or tournament director to assure that there will be twelve slots to qualify six finalists to the National Forensic Association's (NFA) National Tournament or to increase the number of contestants in an event to boost the number of qualifiers for the American Forensic Association's (AFA) National Tournament. Most often, warm body slots are entered as legitimate competition, given real contestant numbers, and often evaluated as a legitimate, rehearsed speech. Unless the warm body entry is identified as such, which in my experience is not the norm, the presentation, whether 2, 6, or 10 minutes is judged against the other competition. Assuming a warm body goes unidentified as such throughout the competition and could potentially place high or even win a round, then the question "Do warm bodies help or hinder the competition?" must be evaluated.

A recent action by the NFA executive council and coaches would lead one to believe that the presence of warm bodies hinders and illegitimizes competition. At the 1990 NFA National Tournament, they agreed to institute a "50%" rule, whereby if the event entry is less than 12 contestants, one half -- 50% -- of those entrants will qualify for the national tournament. For example, if there are ten contestants in an event, five would qualify for the NFA National Tournament. The warm body practice, on the other hand, would encourage placing two unprepared speakers in the event to meet the twelve

slot/six qualifier regulation. Since the "50%" rule has not yet been exercised at an actual tournament, though, its effectiveness of eliminating the use of warm bodies has yet to be seen and does not guarantee abolishment of the practice.

Given the basic function of warm bodies, to meet national tournament qualifying requirements, they are perceived in a variety of ways. I have heard coaches, judges and students complain about them, laugh at them, ignore them and/or commend them. The above reactions are based on knowledge of a warm body entry in the round. Most often, though, this is not the case. The majority of warm bodies do not identify themselves as such, nor can it be assumed that simply because an entry is not well prepared that it is a warm body, both of which may be an obstacle to objective judging.

Whether self-identified or not, how do competitors feel toward warm bodies? Have they ever even contemplated the practice? In personal interviews with a dozen veteran competitors in the central Ohio area, the reactions to warm bodies were mixed, but the objections were few and minimal. As I expected, most had never given the issue much thought but were definitely aware of warm body usage.

In order to understand student reactions to warm bodies, the question "How do you define a warm body?" must be answered. Reactions ranged from "very warm," to unprepared, to a "mercy" slot. Whatever the description of a warm body, competitors agree with the use of warm bodies to meet qualifying requirements. The majority of competitors understand that sometimes warm bodies will be used and don't really feel that warm bodies effect the legitimacy or caliber of tournament competition. This is under the assumption that there is not more than one or two warm bodies per event. But, if close to half of the event is comprised of warm body slots, competitors view that particular event as "sub-par," not of average or high caliber competition. Students agree that if warm bodies are to be used during competition, then the warm bodies should be used for

qualifying purposes only. If a coach is using a warm body merely to boost the team's entry and/or potential for a sweepstakes award or other purpose, then the warm body is not benefitting the tournament participants, only his/her team and is, therefore, not to be condoned.

But a warm body is more than just a "very warm" competitor placed in a round to increase the number of entrants on paper to justify and meet a qualifying standard. Warm bodies in most cases actually give some form of speech or presentation, the opening example for instance. Warm body speeches can be simply a 30 second joke or riddle, an intro from one of the competitor's other speeches, reading an entire manuscript from your coach's files (maybe the judge will just think you're unmemorized?), a dramatic or abbreviated rendition of one of the competitor's "real," legitimate speeches, or a totally impromptu two or three minute speech. Whatever the warm body chooses to present, students agree that a warm body speech is an intentional act, not an unmemorized or poorly rehearsed eight to ten minute speech.

Yet, what the judge thinks about the presentation is what counts. Do judges evaluate warm bodies objectively? Assuming that the presentation was very brief, 30 seconds to 3 minutes, most competitors feel the judges objectively rank warm bodies against the remaining competition. Full-length warm body speeches may sometimes be judged as a legitimate speech. Competitors do not necessarily feel this is fair since they prepared and practiced their presentations and the warm body did not. However, three of the those interviewed stated that if the warm body slot ranked higher in the round than him/her, then the entry deserved the ranking the judge awarded. Most, though, have not ever been beaten by a warm body to their knowledge. One individual had been beaten by a warm body who slipped into a final round of competition at an end of the season tournament. Chuckling bitterly, he said he was happy that at least he and his duo partner placed but that the judges must have liked the other duo with the scriptless

notebook better. Students agree that high-placing warm bodies in a round or finalist warm bodies are the exception and not the rule.

How do the competitors feel about actually being a warm body? Since most agree with, or have no qualms against warm bodies, over 60% said that if asked, they would compete as a warm body. Over half admitted to competing at least once as a warm body at the request of their coach, and two actually trophied as warm bodies. "I felt a little guilty about winning, but it was fun," replied one. But warm body round-winners or trophy-winners appear to be a rare occurrence to the knowledge of most competitors.

Most students have no major complaints about the use of warm bodies, but do not agree with wide spread use in a single event (ie five warm bodies to meet the 12 entry qualifying minimum). Once again, national tournament qualifying standards are the only acceptable reason for warm body entries. But there is a concern among students. If warm body entries become a wide spread and popular practice at a majority of tournaments and are not recognized as such, then the legitimacy and quality of competition and tournament reputation may be at stake. Though most do not see the "warm body syndrome" as an impending evil threatening forensic competition or its future.

The warm body practice will, perhaps, continue to pervade the forensic environment no matter what the attitude concerning the practice. As students, should we be concerned about the use of warm bodies during competition, and if so, what can we do about it? Yes, we, like coaches and tournament directors, need to address the warm body issue. Significant action to help diminish the practice can be taken by supporting the NFA "50%" rule. Also, students entered as warm bodies could identify themselves as such by verbally stating they are a warm body entry, writing "wb" or "warm body" next to their name, or restricting their presentation to no more than three minutes. Some may argue

that the verbal or written identification of a warm body lessens the caliber of competition in the round. But this type of identification in the long run benefits both competitors and judges since the identification leaves no doubt in anyone's mind that the entrant is not there to win the round, only meet a qualifying requirement which will benefit the other entrants.

Whatever course of action is taken against the practice of warm body entries, whether warm bodies remain to be used frequently or whenever necessary or whether they are banished, the practice has benefitted many individuals, giving them an opportunity for competition and achievement they may not have had otherwise. Even though most warm body entries are not identified as such and in turn are evaluated as legitimate competition, competitors do not see wide spread damage to overall competition. While the warm body practice may be leaning toward "overuse" in certain events or at certain tournaments, and in rare incidents may cause more harm than the intended good, competitors seem to have no major qualms or objections to warm bodies when used to meet qualifying requirements. Considering forensics is an educational and learning activity, what better way to learn than by competing and helping to further the advancement of others.